

# Research as an Integral Part of Community Health Services

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THE MOST direct value of research integrated with community health services, and the one most readily appreciated by officials and the public, accrues from the opportunity to study local problems and evaluate local services. The earliest research conducted by the St. Louis County Health Department influenced the development and focus of the service program in mental health. A more recent evaluative research project on the child guidance clinic will, we hope, promote the future efficiency and development of that service.

Health agencies, like medical schools and universities, attract superior personnel when they have sound research and training programs. Such personnel raise the level of the health agency's service programs—the agency's primary purpose. The stimulation of a research atmosphere and the supplementation of salaries through research or teaching appointments also serve to reduce personnel turnover and to promote stability.

Research can brighten the public health image, especially in communities where there were earlier inadequacies in the public health service or unwise political activities. Evidence of research activity and competence in the health department can do much to change unfavorable

attitudes, particularly of members of the medical profession and teaching faculties.

Research stimulates enthusiasm and morale, not only in the professional staff conducting research but also in other professionals given the opportunity to participate, plan, and present research ideas. Nonprofessional personnel also enjoy working in a research setting.

As the research personnel become known throughout the community, they may be invited to provide consultation for research activities of other agencies and groups. Health-related research projects of particular interest to specific agencies may be undertaken by the health department, as a result, or joint research projects may be developed. Research can thus broaden the relationship of the health department with the community and enlarge the scope of its service. Research projects and the qualified personnel working on them strengthen the field training programs for students of various public health disciplines.

With increased funds for research, qualified research workers have become scarce. They can be trained only where competent research is being done. In conducting an active research program, a health department can offer research training which will frequently provide candidates for its own research positions.

Not all health agencies, however, either can or should undertake research, at least directly. A successful research program requires a qualified and experienced research staff as well as other staff and budget of at least moderate size. When research personnel are not available in the agency itself, arrangements may often be

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made for a teaching institution to carry primary research responsibility. Even when the health agency can develop its own research staff, the need for a tie with a teaching institution cannot be overemphasized. For a public health agency, the ideal relationship is with the department of preventive medicine of a medical school or with a school of public health.

It probably would have been impossible for the St. Louis County Health Department to develop a research program without the assistance of the department of preventive medicine of Washington University. The interest and support of the department of preventive medicine helped greatly in the development of a sound and well-staffed health department. A qualified commissioner of health was obtained with a joint appointment to the teaching staff of the department of preventive medicine. While the research activities of the health department can now stand on their own feet, the continuing relationship is of greatest importance. The present level of activity could never have been achieved without this tie.

The St. Louis County Health Department also has a variety of other valuable ties with Washington University's Social Science Institute, departments of psychiatry and child psychiatry, department of sanitary engineering, Institute for Urban Affairs, and Medical Care Research Center, as well as some with St. Louis University.

The research program of an official health agency must be generally accepted by the public and officially accepted by the appropriate authorities. Acceptance is not always easy to achieve. The health agency often needs to approach research programs cautiously. The interest and support of influential professionals and key voluntary agencies is essential. Primary support for the research will need to come from sources other than local tax funds, and assurance will be required that the service program of the agency will not suffer. Later, when research has been shown to be of direct, as well as indirect, value to the community, support may be obtained from the regular budget for at least a basic research staff. The enthusiasm of public officials for research will largely correspond to public acceptance and interest. The space, personnel, time, and money devoted

to research must be kept within reasonable limits in relation to the service program.

Since research of any extent by a community health department is feasible only through outside grants, the decisions of reviewing committees of agencies bestowing grants largely determines the health department's research program, and these committees often need to be convinced of the health agency's competency to conduct research. Except in a very few large health departments, research is a comparatively new development. The research capabilities of staffs of teaching institutions are likely to be taken for granted. The official health agency, however, is usually not expected to have qualified research personnel. Although this attitude is changing, frequent presentation of inadequate projects by unqualified principal investigators has not helped.

#### **Administration of Research**

The mechanism for administering research will to some extent depend on amount of research and size of research staff. In the St. Louis County Health Department, research was combined at first with service activities. Approximately 3 years ago, with the growth of research in quantity and scope, a separate research and development division was created. This division administers current research activities except the radiation project, which is administered by the sanitation division.

The division of research and development functions as a regular division of the health department and assists in many ways in policy decisions and in planning and development not necessarily directly related to research. It maintains a close relationship with other health department divisions, both in connection with ongoing research that may be related to the other divisions' interests and in planning for new research projects. Directors of service divisions and other personnel participate regularly in the consideration of new areas of research and in the planning and writeup of grant requests.

Research personnel become regular members of the health department staff. The creation of positions for appropriately qualified applicants is approved by the civil service board;

the total number of all personnel is approved by the county council. Provision for such positions is limited to the period for which research funds are available. Because of the special requirements for qualified research personnel, the personnel division has been helpful in approving research positions and permits the department to do its own recruiting, maintaining only the minimum control necessary for operation of the merit system.

Consultants from outside the department are freely used in research planning and as members of advisory committees for ongoing projects. For the most part, these are faculty members from various teaching institutions in the area, but may also, on occasion, include outside consultants.

The regular staff of the research and development division, who are on the regular departmental payroll, consists of one director, with a Ph.D. in social psychology; one assistant director, who is a psychologist and has completed work for a Ph.D. with the exception of approval of his dissertation; one senior research assistant; and one secretary.

Special research personnel, paid entirely from grant funds, include two project directors, one a psychologist with a Ph.D. and one a psychiatric social worker working toward a Ph.D., one psychiatric social worker, one statistical clerk, and five research assistants.

Also the following primarily administrative or service personnel are significantly involved with research: the commissioner, M.D., Dr.P.H.; the director of mental health, M.D., a qualified child psychiatrist; the director of vital statistics, a Ph.D. in sociology and qualified in demography; and the director of sanitation, P.E.

From time to time other public health physicians, medical social workers, public health nurses, the supervising nutritionist, and the supervising health educator also engage in research.

### **Research Funds**

Some health agencies with extensive research programs have created separate corporations to receive research grant funds and to carry out research projects. Such funds and person-

nel need not be under the same limitations as regular departmental activities in regard to civil service regulations and official control of appropriations. On the other hand, a separate corporation may result in less departmental control.

The basic research staff is provided the St. Louis County Health Department from regular tax funds disbursed through the regular county mechanism. Since there is a special public health tax, funds do not come from, or revert to, the general fund. Each grant is placed in a special earmarked account which limits use of the money to the specific purpose of the grant. Contract research funds are handled in the same way. When personnel on the regular departmental payroll spend a specified time working on a research project, the regular health department budget is reimbursed from the research account.

Approximately 50 percent of the amount of the research grant or contract allowed for overhead is placed in the regular health department budget, and approximately 50 percent is placed in a special research fund. The special fund has been approved by the county council for support of small pilot research projects, planning of new projects, consultation services, and the like. It is of great benefit in filling particular needs quickly as they arise. In the past an itemized appropriation by the county council for each research project had been required. Recently, however, an open appropriation of the total amount has been approved, to be allocated by the commissioner of health as he sees fit. This allows considerable flexibility in the use of funds and reduces redtape.

### **Current Research Activities**

At present 12 research projects are in various stages. These include one in the pilot stage, supported by a small planning grant, one which has been recently funded but not as yet staffed, and one or two that have been completed except for additional analysis of data and the preparation of the final reports.

The following list of current projects indicates the scope of research activities:

Behavior symptoms in school children.

The early detection of emotional illnesses in school children.

An evaluation of the health department child guidance clinic.

An evaluation of a preventive community mental health program.

Further study of the dimensions of adjustment in school children.

Medical care of aging parents.

Mental health research training program (under joint sponsorship with the Social Science Institute of Washington University).

Socialization in the classroom.

The social-psychological study of selected problems in tuberculosis control.

The study and evaluation of consultation in public health.

The study of maternal attitudes.

A study of some consequences of physical and social mobility for the adjustment of school children.

Sources of funds to support these projects included the National Institute of Mental Health, the Milbank Fund, the department of psychiatry at Washington University, the Medical Care Research Center, the Social Science Research Council, the Tuberculosis and Health Society of St. Louis, and the special research fund of the St. Louis County Health Department.

Six of these projects are in mental health, our earliest area of research; three entail evaluative or administrative research; one is on chronic illness; and another is on research training (in collaboration with the Social Science Institute). The most recent project is supported by a grant of \$20,000 a year for 5 years from the St. Louis Tuberculosis Society for social-psychological studies of hard-to-reach and hard-to-follow groups with tuberculosis. The society is a somewhat unusual source of a grant, and our research division is excited about the project's possibilities.

The total of more than \$200,000 in our research division budget for 1962 and the number of projects underway has raised the question as to reasonable limits for research activities. Although we have about reached saturation, we have a number of other potentially researchable projects in mind. We will try to carry them through the preplanning phases over the next couple of years in the hope that they can be presented and funded as current projects are

completed. Such planning is a major part of any research program.

A radiation research project, begun about 21½ years ago, is carried out under contract with the Division of Radiological Health of the Public Health Service. Originally set up to study the level of strontium 90 in milk in relation to strontium 90 in various sources of feed and to different farm practices, the project has recently been broadened, at the request of the Public Health Service, to include study of other radionuclides in milk in relation to certain experimental farm situations. The Public Health Service has provided all equipment and personnel for the project, of which the total budget for 1962 was approximately \$100,000. The project director, a Ph.D. in biochemistry with special training in radiation, is assisted by eight professional and semiprofessional workers.

This project has contributed directly and importantly to the service program of the department. The availability of a variety of expensive and highly technical equipment and the presence of the specially qualified personnel have made possible an extensive air, water, milk, and rain surveillance program for the metropolitan area. These have also enabled the health department to participate in other cooperative research projects with the Public Health Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and other agencies.

The leadership role of the health department in connection with health services in general is greatly enhanced by a research program. Particularly in these days of changing and complex health problems, which cannot possibly be handled by a single agency, the importance of leadership by the official health agency cannot be overstated.

The development of the St. Louis County Health Department as a community resource for advice and assistance to other groups and agencies in research and training has been notable. At the present time we have more calls for collaboration or assistance than we can meet. Nevertheless, this puts us in a strong community position.